

THE HARVEST AND THE VINTAGE

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*“And I looked, and behold a white cloud, and upon the cloud one sat like unto the Son of man,
having on his head a golden crown, and in his hand a sharp sickle.
And another angel came out of the temple, crying with a loud voice to him that sat on the cloud,
Thrust in thy sickle, and reap: for the time is come for thee to reap; for the harvest of the earth is ripe.
And he that sat on the cloud thrust in his sickle on the earth; and the earth was reaped.
And another angel came out of the temple which is in heaven, he also having a sharp sickle.
And another angel came out from the altar, which had power over fire;
and cried with a loud cry to him that had the sharp sickle, saying,
Thrust in thy sharp sickle, and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth; for her grapes are fully ripe.
And the angel thrust in his sickle into the earth, and gathered the vine of the earth,
and cast it into the great winepress of the wrath of God.
And the winepress was trodden outside the city, and blood came out of the winepress,
even unto the horse bridles, by the space of a thousand and six hundred furlongs.”*
Revelation 14:14-20

I AM no prophet, nor the son of a prophet, neither do I profess to be able to explain all the prophecies in this blessed Book. I believe that many of them will only be explained as the events occur which they foretell. Yet there are some things which are plain even to the most superficial reader. It is plain for instance, that it is certainly foretold that the power of antichrist shall be utterly and eternally destroyed, and that Babylon, that is to say, the Papal system, with all its abominations, shall be cast like a millstone into the flood, to rise no more forever.

It is also certain that the Jews, as a people, will yet own Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of David, as their King, and that they will return to their own land, “and they shall build the old wastes, they shall raise up the former desolations, and they shall repair the waste cities, the desolations of many generations.”

It is also certain that our Lord Jesus Christ will come again to this earth, and that He will reign among His ancients gloriously, and that there will be a thousand years of joy and peace such as were never known on this earth before.

It is also certain that there will be a great and general judgment, when all nations shall be gathered before the Son of man sitting upon the throne of His glory, and His final word concerning those upon His left hand will be, “These shall go away into everlasting punishment,” and concerning those upon His right hand, “but the righteous into life eternal.”

How all these great events are to be chronologically arranged, I cannot tell. This I know—for I have read a multitude of books upon this subject and of making them there is practically no end—all the authors seem to me to be wonderfully wise in confuting one another, but not to be so successful in establishing their own theories. Therefore I am content to believe what I see to be clearly taught in the Scriptures, and to leave to abler minds than my own the arrangement of the various events in some sort of historical sequence.

This however, seems to me to be clearly revealed in the Scriptures, that there is to come, somewhen—we know not when—a solemn winding up of all the events of this world's history. Whatever else may happen, or may not happen, the apostle Paul plainly declared that God “hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that Man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.”

Even though we cannot comprehend some things that are foretold by John, or Isaiah, or Daniel, or Ezekiel, we know that “it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment,” and that “we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to what he hath done, whether it be good or bad.” Judgment must certainly come, even to the house of God, for Peter says that there it shall begin, and if it shall begin there, “what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God?”

That there will be a day of judgment appears to be clear even to human reason, for apart from revelation, or perhaps, assisted by some dim relics of it, all nations—I think I may say all, for no exceptions are known to me—have believed in a judgment. They have called it by different names, and they have described it in various ways, but they have all believed, more or less clearly, in a great throne of justice, before which wrongs will be rectified, sin will be punished, and righteousness will be rewarded.

This has seemed so self-evident, even to the crudest thoughts of the lowest of mankind, that in some shape or other, the most benighted nations have believed it, and it strikes one at once, as being most reasonable, for in this world, how often does infamy triumph! How often is oppression linked with power to destroy innocence and virtue! What are the groans, and sighs, and wailings that I hear, and what the tears that I see, but the outbursts of men who are being crushed beneath the awful burden of lifelong injustice?

The best of men are all too often, trodden down as the very mire of the street, while the worst are sitting proudly in the high places of the earth. If there be a God at all—and we know that there is—there must be a time and a way of rectifying all this in another state, and so there is, as David says, “Verily there is a reward for the righteous: verily he is a God that judges in the earth,” and therefore, verily there must be a time of judgment for the ungodly, even common reason seems to teach us that.

Moreover, there is within us all, a conscience, which Shakespeare says “does make cowards of us all,” and well I think it possible that it may do so, since we have all sinned and turned from the path of right. Let man do what he will with that conscience—unless there be an extraordinary restraint put upon it—it bears testimony to the great fact that the judgment is coming on apace. We have known men stifle or silence this voice till they have come to a sickbed, or have been at sea in a storm, yet why have they been so alarmed at the approach of death? Death itself is not to be feared, but it is—

*“The dread of something after death—
The undiscovered country, from whose bourn
No traveler returns”—*

that makes a man cling even to an ignominious and shameful life rather than hurry himself, all unprepared, before the bar of God. Men who have, when in health, denied this, have as they have lain dying, proved that they believed it by the cold clammy sweat that has stood upon their brow at the very thought of passing into the spirit world. They have known that there is a God—a God who must do right—and knowing that they have done wrong, they have been afraid to fall into the hands of the living God.

But we are not left to the faint taper of human reason, or to the flickering candle of conscience, we have the full sunlight of divine revelation. Our Lord Jesus Christ Himself has told us in divers ways, sometimes by parable, and sometimes by plain speech, that there is a day assuredly coming in which all mankind shall stand before His bar, and the apostle John, in the visions which we are about to consider, had a view, not exactly of the judgment itself, but of a parable or picture of that judgment.

May the Holy Spirit help us to look into it with divinely opened eyes, and may He graciously impress the truth concerning the judgment upon all our hearts!

Before we consider my main subject, let me call your attention to what John says about the coming of the Judge, “I looked, and behold a white cloud, and upon the cloud one sat like unto the Son of man, having on his head a golden crown, and in His hand a sharp sickle.”

Observe then, first, *the Judge’s throne*. On that great judgment day, He will come, sitting upon a cloud. What can this metaphor mean? Surely it must mean that His judgment seat will be far more glorious than the thrones of mere mortal monarchs. They may sit upon thrones of ivory, they may exalt themselves upon thrones made of gold, and bedecked with myriads of gems shining like the eyes of the morning, or the stars of the midnight sky, but their thrones can never be compared in splendor with the judgment seat of Christ.

A great white throne shall come sailing along the sky, and on it shall sit the King of kings, and Lord of lords, the Judge of all, who has the right to sit in judgment, whose decisions will be impartial and infallible, and whose sentences will assuredly be carried out. He asks not for any throne that this world could supply, He borrows no leave to judge from Parliament, or Pope, or prince. He is Judge by divine right, as Himself God, and as the Mediator, appointed by God to judge the quick and the dead.

His mysterious throne is also said to be “a white cloud.” The word expresses, not so much the color of whiteness, as the dazzling brilliancy of a white substance—dazzling because of its perfect purity. A throne as of alabaster shall that white cloud be to Him—a throne as of transparent glass, pure as crystal—a throne that shall be without spot or blemish—a throne whose judgment no bribe can ever influence—a throne concerning which it may be said that the Judge seated there ne’er fears the face of man or devil, nor will He ever do any man or devil an injustice, but will “lay judgment to the line, and righteousness to the plummet.”

The Judge’s throne, then, shall be unique for its splendor and unearthly purity, and He will be seated upon a cloud, which will be so elevated in the sky that all can see it. If Christ were to be seated upon a throne set up at Jerusalem or at Rome, only a part of the world’s vast population would be able to behold Him, but on that tremendous day, there shall be an audience chamber large enough to hold the quick and the dead of all climes and all times, and Christ shall be there, above them all, “and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him.”

So, on some calm summer evening, as the sun has been setting, I have seen a cloud, wafted by the wind in the very face of the sun, and the sun has shone upon it, lighting it up with such glory as heaven’s pencil alone could give, and I have said to myself, “So shall it be in that day when the Son of man shall appear, seated upon a white cloud as his last throne of judgment.”

Now turn your eye for a little while, from the Judge’s throne to *His Person*, “Upon the cloud one sat like unto the Son of man.” And well may John say “like unto the Son of man,” for it is none but He, “THE Son of man.” Man has had many sons, but no other like this “Son of man.” He is the truest man who ever lived—the most manly of all men—the only one in whom manhood has reached its perfection, and in that day, every eye shall see that, though He is “very God of very God,” yet is He also just as truly man. They shall behold the nail prints in His hands and His feet, and the marks of the spear thrust in His side, and they shall see that it is even He whom they called, “the Nazarene,” and whom wicked men nailed to the cross of Calvary.

It is HE who shall come to judge the quick and the dead—the gentle Jesus, “meek and lowly in heart” still, full of love, and abundant in mercy, for those attributes can never depart from our Lord Jesus Christ, yet they will be consistent with the sternest justice and the most unflinching administration of the law of God.

It will go ill in that day, with those who have despised the Lamb of Calvary, for they shall find that He is also “the Lion of the tribe of Judah.” None are more terrible in justice than those who are tender in mercy. Bring to me the gentlest spirit that ever lived, and begin to tell the tale of the Bulgarian massacres, and I will guarantee you that in proportion to the tenderness will be the indignation. They, who have no heart, cannot display real indignation, but where there beats a true heart of love, there must be righteous wrath against that which is unloving, holy anger against that which is unjust and true.

So shall it be with Him who will sit upon the white cloud. With a perfectly balanced mind, calm and absolutely impartial, gentle, yet terrible, He will sit upon that throne of spotless purity, “and every eye shall see him.” My eyes shall see Him, and your eyes shall see Him, and the eyes of everyone who has been born of woman shall see Him in that day.

We have glanced at the Judge’s throne, and at His person, now let us note *His adornments*. John mentions that he saw “on his head a golden crown.” That is to signify that He is a Sovereign, and indeed, as I have already reminded you, He is King of kings, and Lord of lords, and He is to be the Judge of all by virtue of His divine authority and power.

How different it will be to see Him with a crown of gold upon His head from what it was to see Him wearing that terrible crown of thorns which the cruel soldiers plaited, and thrust upon His brow! The word used here does not usually refer to the diadem of power, but to the crown won in conflict, and it is very remarkable that it should be said that, when Christ comes to judge the world, He will wear the garland of victory, the crown which He has won in the great battle which He has fought.

How significant of His final triumph will that crown of gold be about those brows that were once covered with bloody sweat when He was fighting the battle for our salvation! As His saints catch a glimpse of that fillet of gold, they will remember His victorious words, “It is finished;” and the very sight of that golden crown will fill their hearts with ineffable joy and delight, for they will recollect that He triumphed on the cross for them, and that He has vanquished all their foes, and now He has come to claim them as the reward of His struggles, and the spoils of His victory.

Give one more look at the Judge upon His throne, and you will see that He carries “in His hand a sharp sickle” or reaping hook. This is His scepter and it signifies that He has come to finish His last great work, which will be sharp, swift, and decisive. When He came to fight the battle of truth, “out of His mouth went a sharp twoedged sword,” but now, it is hand work rather than mouth work with Him. There will be no ministry of mercy now, no further proclamation of the Gospel, but with a sharp sickle, Christ will come to reap. The sowing time will be over, and the reaping time will have come.

What a sight that will be! “For he will finish the work, and cut it short in righteousness: because a short work will the Lord make upon the earth.” On that last tremendous day, when the earth will be rocking and reeling to and fro in terror at His coming, there will be a fulfillment of that verse in the last chapter of this Book, “He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still. And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be.”

I. Now follow me while we look, first, at THE HARVEST, and may the Spirit of God render these great truths exceedingly impressive to us!

The first thing to be done, at the coming of the Lord, is to gather to Himself His own people—the wheat which He Himself sowed, the precious grain which He watered with His bitter tears and His bloody sweat, “Another angel came out of the temple, crying with a loud voice to him that sat on the cloud, Thrust in thy sickle, and reap: for the time is come for thee to reap; for the harvest of the earth is ripe.”

Notice that *this reaping comes first*, and I think it comes *first in order of time*. If I read the Scriptures aright, there are to be two resurrections, and the first will be the resurrection of the righteous; for it is written, “But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he that has part in the first resurrection, on such the second death has no power.”

Sometimes in Scripture, the resurrection of the just and of the unjust is represented as taking place simultaneously, and at other times, they are represented as having an interval of a thousand years between the two, yet a thousand years are but as one day to God, and it may be that the whole period is included in the day of judgment.

Still, it strikes me that we have sufficient warrant from Scripture to say that in the order of time, the harvest comes before the vintage, as Paul says, “The dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are

alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air; and so shall we ever be with the Lord.” After that, I gather that He will come to judge and to condemn the wicked.

But certainly, if not first in order of time, it is here put *first in order of importance*, for it is the ingathering of the wheat to which Christ specially looks forward, it is this on which His soul is set with ardent longing. Judgment is His strange work, His left-handed work, but “He delighteth in mercy,” and He will put this work first when He comes to “judge the world with righteousness, and the people with his truth.” He has such regard for His saints that “when he maketh inquisition for blood, he remembereth them.” His eye is ever fixed upon them, and even on the day of judgment, the great event to Christ shall be the clearing of the righteous from every accusation that may be brought against them, the complete and final justification of as many as have believed in Him.

We can see from reading this passage, that those to be left, after the righteous are gathered in, are very clearly indicated. In this world, in the present state, there is a mixture of good and bad. Here, the tares and the wheat grow close together in the same field, and as a general rule, no man can tell the tares from the wheat. If any of us were to try to root up the tares, we should be almost sure to also root up the wheat. But in that day, the righteous and the wicked will be easily distinguished from one another.

Nobody ever mistook an ear of wheat for a cluster of grapes, and when Christ comes the distinction between the righteous and the wicked will be as clearly manifested between a field of wheat in the time of harvest and a vineyard when the grapes are ripe. It is plainly declared that in that day, God’s wheat will be ripe for the heavenly garner, “Thrust in thy sickle, and reap: for the time is come for thee to reap; for the harvest of the earth is ripe.”

When the Lord Jesus comes, every child of God will be found to be ripe for heaven. There is a great deal of greenness and sourness in us while we are in the blade and in the ear, but when we are dried—as the word might be translated—when the wheat has become mellowed by the ripening influences of autumn—then shall we be as sweet, ripe corn for the Lord of the harvest to gather into His garner.

Some of you do not feel very ripe at present, but you may rest assured that you will not be harvested until you are fully ripe. The Lord will not reap one ear of His corn green, and He has a secret way of preparing His people for heaven when He has prepared heaven for them. The righteous will be perfectly ripe in that day, “The time is come for thee to reap; for the harvest of the earth is ripe.”

Notice also, that they are all to be gathered in, and that this great task is to be accomplished by the crowned King Himself. I want that fact to be specially noted by you, so let me again read the sixteenth verse, “And he that sat on the cloud thrust in his sickle on the earth; and the earth was reaped.” With the golden crown upon His brow, He that is like unto the Son of man will stoop from His throne of cloud, and reap His saints—gathering them all to His bosom in one glorious sweep of His strong right arm.

It does not say that Christ will send an angel to do this reaping. His love to His chosen is so great that He will not entrust this task to any angel, but will do it all Himself. He alone knows how much that ripe corn has cost Him. Those precious souls were espoused unto Him from eternity, and they were redeemed by Him with His own heart’s blood. They are members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones, so He gathers them unto Himself, and does not think it beneath His dignity Himself to be the reaper of this golden grain.

Do you not delight in that thought—you who love the Lord? Does not your heart rejoice in knowing that in that great day when you stand like ripe corn, Christ shall come, sitting upon a white cloud, and having on His head a golden crown, and with the sharp sickle in His hand, He will gather you unto Himself with the glad joy of the reaper?

It is another metaphor that we find in the book of Malachi, but it has the same meaning, “They shall be mine, saith the LORD of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels.” None can tell, not even those who have had the greatest sympathy with Christ in the sowing, what will be His joy in the reaping, and what shall be our joy too, when we enter into the joy of our glorified Lord.

The harvest, even on earth, is a happy time; hear how the reapers sing and shout as they carry the golden sheaves into the garner, but what rejoicing and what shouting there will be when we, as shocks of corn fully ripe, are taken home to the heavenly garner! Well did we sing just now, in anticipation of that last harvest home—

*“Hallelujah!
Welcome, welcome, Son of God!”*

May you and I, dear friends, all be garnered amongst the wheat in that great harvest day!

II. Now, for a little while, we must have the very heavy task of looking at THE VINTAGE.

The vintage represents the destruction of the wicked, “And another angel came out of the temple which is in heaven, he also having a sharp sickle.” You see, it is not the crowned Christ who comes to do this work of judgment, but an angel. “And another angel came out from the altar, which had power over fire; and cried with a loud cry to him that had the sharp sickle, saying, Thrust in thy sharp sickle, and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth; for her grapes are fully ripe.” I want to speak to you very calmly, yet very solemnly, about this last vintage, because it may concern some of you. If you do not escape from the wrath to come, it *must* concern you—awfully and terribly concern you.

Notice first, that *this vintage comes after the harvest*. As I have told you, I think it will be so in the order of time. After Christ shall have gathered His saints unto Himself, then shall He summon the wicked to appear before His judgment seat. Then shall follow their terrible condemnation, and even if it is not second in the order of time, it will be second in the order of importance. Dreadful as is their doom, our Lord Jesus Christ does not look upon that as the principal event of that last great day. His own words are, “The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; and shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Then shall the righteous come forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father.”

As I said before, the wicked will be clearly distinguished from the righteous in that day. Nobody will mistake them then. They may be mistaken here, for they may go to the same place of worship, they may sing the same hymns, and in many respects they may be like the children of God. We may easily mistake tares—such tares as Christ mentioned—for blades of wheat, but again I remark that there is no possibility of mistaking a cluster of grapes for an ear of corn. So, in that day, there will be no way of evading the Judge’s infallible judgment, there will be no miscarriage of justice before the bar of God.

Observe next, that the *condemnation of the ungodly is called for by the angel of fire*, “Another angel came out from the altar, which had power over fire.” Ah, me! what means this? Has God appointed some holy spirits to watch over the instruments of terror with which He will execute the fierceness of His wrath?

Was that the angel, “which had power over fire,” who launched the thunderbolts in Egypt on that dread night when the firstborn in all the land were slain unless they were sheltered under the sprinkled blood? Was that the angel, “which had power over fire,” who smote the hosts of Sennacherib? Was that the angel, “which had power over fire,” who opened the furnaces of hell, and caused fire and brimstone to descend on guilty Sodom and Gomorrah? It may be so, and that this same angel shall come forward at the last, to demand that justice shall be executed upon those who have despised God, and rejected Jesus Christ whom He has sent.

It appears also from the parable, that *the wicked will be fully ripe for punishment*. That is a very strong expression in the eighteenth verse, “Gather the clusters of the vine of the earth; *for her grapes are fully ripe*.” The righteous are said to be ripe, some of them perhaps only just ripe, but the wicked are fully ripe, for sin has a wonderfully ripening effect upon men. They add iniquity unto iniquity until they have filled up the measure of it. The Greek word used here, means that they have reached their *acme*—they have come to the highest point of sin.

Are any of you here fully ripe? Why, I think that one sin makes a man ripe for judgment, but to go on year after year, despising Christ, and rejecting His Gospel, must make man what we call “dead ripe.”

When a man goes on to profanity, and blasphemy, and infidelity, surely he must be “fully ripe.” So will all be in that great day of the gathering of the vintage of woe, and just as the clusters of the vine cannot resist the force of the hand that plucks them, or the sharp knife that cuts them off, so shall the wicked in that day, be utterly defenseless, hopeless, and helpless, and he that reaps them with his sharp sickle, shall find no difficulty in cutting them all off. Again I remind you that it will not be Christ who will do this work, an angel will do it, not the crowned King seated on the white cloud. They would not have anything to do with Him, so He will have nothing to do with them, except to deliver them over to the angel that has power over fire, and His brother executioner.

What a terrible sight that judgment will be! As John looked upon it in his vision, I feel sure that his very bones must have trembled, and the marrow in them must have melted, as he saw that angel, with his sharp sickle, quickly reap all the clusters of the vine of the earth, and cast them into the great winepress of the wrath of God.

O sinner, this is but a faint picture of the doom of the lost, yet the picture itself is too terrible for me to try to describe or explain it! What will happen in that great day, when you shall be reaped and cast into the great winepress of the wrath of God—or as it may be read, “the great winepress of an angry God”? Ask yourself, my hearer, this solemn question, “Shall *I* ever be cast into that great winepress?” If you do continue to reject the mercy of Christ, what else can happen to you?

Note further, that *this winepress is “without the city”*—not in the New Jerusalem—not in heaven—but “without the city.” That reminds us of another winepress, or olive press, which was “without the city,” and which was called Gethsemane, where He, who shall by and by, be seated on the white cloud, Himself suffered even unto agony and bloody sweat. These people would not plead His sufferings on their own account, they would not have Him to reign over them, and therefore, they must go into the great winepress of the angry God.

Perhaps in that dread day, if any of you are there—which may God in mercy prevent!—you will remember that wondrous passage, in the prophecy of Isaiah, in which Christ says, “I have trodden the winepress alone; and of the people there was none with me,” and as you would not have the salvation which He wrought out in that winepress, you must be cast into the great winepress of the wrath of God.

“And the winepress was trodden without the city.” This represents the awful suffering of lost souls, the eternal punishment that will then begin. And as the red juice spurts from the trodden grapes, so did John, in his terrible vision, see the blood of men come flowing forth, “even unto the horse bridles, by the space of a thousand and six hundred furlongs.” That metaphor and measurement are meant to show how terrible is the wrath of God against the ungodly.

Perhaps someone here says, “That is too terrible a theme to talk about.” Then, what must it be to endure it? Somebody will cavil at my words upon this awful topic. Nay, sir, cavil at the Scriptures, not at me. I do not explain the idea, but I tell you what John saw in vision. “It was only a vision,” someone says. I know it was, but the reality will be far more terrible. There can be no possible exaggeration of the wrath of God.

I beseech you, my dear hearers—though I know not, and never wish to know, much about this dreadful subject—remember that what we do know about the doom of the lost is enough to make one’s hair stand on end, and one’s heart almost to cease to beat, so I beseech you, do not risk that doom for yourselves. Escape for your lives, look not behind you, but fly to the one refuge which God has provided. Whosoever will entrust His soul to Jesus Christ shall be eternally saved. Look unto Him who wore the crown of thorns, and repose your soul’s entire confidence in Him, and then, in that last great day, you shall see Him seated on the white cloud, wearing the golden crown, and you shall be gathered with the wheat into His garner.

But if you reject Him, do not think it wrong that you should be cast with the grapes into the winepress of the wrath of God, and be trodden with the rest of “the clusters of the vine of the earth.” I beg you to take Christ as your Savior, this very hour, lest this night you should die unsaved. Lay hold of Jesus, lest you never hear another Gospel invitation or warning.

If I have seemed to speak terribly, God knows that I have done it out of love to your souls, and believe me, that I do not speak as strongly as the truth might well permit me to do, for there is something far more terrible about the doom of the lost, than language can ever express or thought conceive. God save all of you from ever suffering that doom, for Jesus Christ's sake! Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON

REVELATION 14

Verse 1. *And I looked, and, lo, a Lamb stood on the mount sion, and with him an hundred forty and four thousand, having his Father's name written on their foreheads.*

The great question for us is—shall we be among the number? If we have the Father's name engraved upon our hearts, we may conclude that we shall, one day, have it written in our foreheads, and that we shall be among that chosen company.

2-3. *And I heard a voice from heaven, as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of a great thunder: and I heard the voice of harpers harping with their harps: and they sung as it were a new song before the throne, and before the four beasts, and the elders: and no man could learn that song but the hundred and forty and four thousand, which were redeemed from the earth.*

Notice how loud their singing was—it was like many waters and great thunder. But notice also, the sweetness of it, for it was melodious as the music of well skilled harpers harping with their harps. Note too, the freshness, the vivacity of it, “they sang as it were a new song.” Shall we be there to sing that new song? If so, we must be “redeemed from the earth,” not with a general, but with a particular redemption, which lifts us up from the rest of our fellow creatures, and we must also have attended the sacred rehearsals, for none can sing in heaven but those who have learned the song, and none can learn it but those who are “redeemed from the earth.”

4-5. *These are they which were not defiled with women, for they are virgins. These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth. These were redeemed from among men, being the firstfruits unto God and to the Lamb. And in their mouth was found no guile: for they are without fault before the throne of God.*

Now we have another vision.

6-7. *And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people, saying with a loud voice, Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come: and worship him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters.*

This vision represents the spread of the Gospel. It is generally referred to the Reformation period, when on a sudden, the truth, which had so long lain hidden in old musty tomes, was proclaimed in every marketplace. Beneath many a “Gospel oak” the good news was told out—the good news concerning Christ—as if an angel were flying through the midst of heaven. This preaching of the truth led to the commencement of the downfall of Rome, which is here called Babylon, and which is ultimately to fall to utter and everlasting ruin.

8. *And there followed another angel, saying, Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication.*

That is, spiritual fornication, as we understand it in the Old Testament—man's idolatry—the setting up of visible objects of worship, instead of the invisible God. And what is there, in all the world, that is so idolatrous as the so-called “religion” of Rome? She multiplies her idol gods to great excess—her crosses and her crucifixes, her saints and her saintesses, her “sacraments” and her relics, her “old cast clouts” and her “old rotten rags.” The Papacy is the most paganish of all the paganisms that have ever existed on the face of the earth, but it is to come to an end, for the mouth of the Lord has said so.

9-10. *And the third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, If any man worship the beast and his image, and receive his mark in his forehead, or on his hand, the same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb:*

How clear, therefore, we ought to keep out of this idolatrous system! For even if we have not the mark of the beast in our foreheads by an open profession of loyalty to it, yet if we have the mark in our hands by being the partakers of Rome's sins, we shall also be partakers of her plagues concerning Romanism in all its forms. The great message to be proclaimed today is, "Come out of her, my people—come away from her, as far as the poles are asunder—that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues."

11-12. *And the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever: and they have no rest day nor night, who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receiveth the mark of his name. Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus.*

Truly, Rome has tried "the patience of the saints." What country is there in Europe which has not been dyed crimson with the blood of the martyrs? The rack, the stake, the block, the dungeon, the fires, all sorts of cruelties have been practiced upon those who "keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus." Let the valleys of Piedmont speak, do they not cry aloud to our God for vengeance? Let the St. Bartholomew massacre bear witness before the living God. Let the stakes of Smithfield say, "Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus."

13. *And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them.*

It matters not where they die, or under what ignominy they die—whether branded with the name of heretic, or cast out as the offscouring of all things, yet blessed are they, and their works follow them to heaven to bear witness to their faith, and they, spiritually, continue to live on earth to propagate the gracious seed for which they laid down their lives.

14-18. *And I looked, and behold a white cloud, and upon the cloud one sat like unto the Son of man, having on his head a golden crown, and in his hand a sharp sickle. And another angel came out of the temple, crying with a loud voice to him that sat on the cloud, Thrust in thy sickle, and reap: for the time is come for thee to reap; for the harvest of the earth is ripe. And he that sat on the cloud thrust in his sickle on the earth; and the earth was reaped. And another angel came out of the temple which is in heaven, he also having a sharp sickle. And another angel came out from the altar, which had power over fire; and cried with a loud cry to him that had the sharp sickle, saying, Thrust in thy sharp sickle, and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth; for her grapes are fully ripe.*

After the glad harvest comes the sad vintage. After the ingathering of the righteous, there will be the ingathering of the wicked.

19-20. *And the angel thrust in his sickle into the earth, and gathered the vine of the earth, and cast it into the great winepress of the wrath of God. And the winepress was trodden without the city, and blood came out of the winepress, even unto the horse bridles, by the space of a thousand and six hundred furlongs.*

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—364, 345, 363

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